



# Chambers's Journal

## SIXTH SERIES.

### THE RED RAT'S DAUGHTER.

By GUY BOOTHBY,

Author of *Billy Binks—Hero*; *The Fascination of the King*; &c.

#### CHAPTER I.

**I**F John Grantham Browne had a fault—which, mind you, I do not at all admit—it lay in the fact that he was the possessor of a cynical wit which he was apt at times to use upon his friends with somewhat peculiar effect. Circumstances alter cases, and many people would have argued that he was perfectly entitled to do so. Surely when a man is worth a hundred and twenty thousand pounds a year—which, worked out, means ten thousand pounds a month, twenty-nine pounds thirteen and fourpence a day, and four-and-sixpence three-farthings, and a fraction over, per minute—he may be excused if he becomes a little sceptical of other people's motives, and is apt to be distrustful of the world in general. Old Brown, his father, without the 'e,' as you have doubtless observed, started life as a bare-legged street arab in one of the big manufacturing centres—Manchester or Birmingham, I am not quite certain which. His head, however, must have been screwed on the right way, for he made few mistakes, and everything he touched turned to gold. At thirty his bank balance stood at fifteen thousand pounds; at forty it had turned the corner of a hundred thousand; and when he departed this transitory life, at the early age of seventy, he left his widow, young John's mother—his second wife, I may remark in passing, and the third daughter of the late Lord Rushbrooke—upwards of three and a half million pounds sterling in trust for the boy.

As somebody very wittily remarked at the time, young John, at his father's death and during his minority, was a sort of monetary Mohammed—he hovered between two worlds, the Rushbrookes, on one side, who had not two sixpences to rub against each other, and the Brownes, on the other, who reckoned their wealth in millions and talked of thousands as we humbler mortals do of half-

crowns. Taken altogether, however, old Brown was not a bad sort of a fellow. Unlike so many parvenus, he had the good sense, the 'e' always excepted, not to set himself up to be what he certainly was not. He was a working-man, he would tell you with a twinkle in his eye, and he had made his own way in the world. He had never in his life owed a halfpenny, nor, to the best of his knowledge, had he ever defrauded anybody; and, if he *had* made his fortune out of soap, well—and here his eyes would glisten—soap was at least a very useful article, and would wash his millions cleaner than a good many other commodities he might mention. In his tastes and habits he was simplicity itself. Indeed, it was no unusual sight to see the old fellow, preparatory to setting off for the City, coming down the steps of his magnificent town house, dressed in a suit of rough tweed, with the famous bird's-eye neck-cloth loosely twisted round his throat, and the soft felt hat upon his head—two articles of attire which no remonstrance on the part of his wife and no amount of ridicule from the comic journals could ever induce him to discard. His stables were full of carriages, and there was a cab-rank within a hundred yards of his front door, yet no one had ever known him set foot in either. The soles of his boots were thick, and he had been accustomed to walk all his life, he would say, and he had no intention of being carried till he was past caring what became of him. With regard to his son, the apple of his eye and the pride of his old age, his views were entirely different. Nothing was good enough for the boy. From the moment he opened his eyes upon the light, all the luxuries and advantages wealth could give were showered upon him. Before he was short-coated, upwards of a million had been placed to his credit at the bank, not to be touched until he came of age. After he had passed from

a dame-school to Eton, he returned after every holiday with sufficient money loose in his pocket to have treated the whole school. When, in the proper order of things, he went on to Christ Church, his rooms were the envy and the admiration of the university. As a matter of fact, he never knew what it was to have to deny himself anything; and it says something for the lad's nature, and the father's too, I think, that he should have come out of it the honest, simple Englishman he was. Then old John died; his wife followed suit six months later; and on his twenty-fifth birthday the young man found himself alone in the world with his money. Little though he thought it at the time, there were troubles in store for him.

He had town houses, country seats, moors and salmon-fishings, yachts (steam and sailing), race-horses, hunters, coach-horses, polo-ponies, and an army of servants that a man might well shudder to think of. But he lacked one thing: he had no wife. Society, however, was prepared to remedy this defect. Indeed, it soon showed that it was abnormally anxious to do so. Before he was twenty-two it had been rumoured that he had become engaged to something like a score of girls, each one lovelier, sweeter, and bluer-blooded than the last. A wiser and an older head might very well have been forgiven had it succumbed to the attacks made upon it; but in his veins, mingled with the aristocratic Rushbrooke blood, young John had an equal portion of that of the old soap-boiler; and where the one led him to accept invitations to country houses at Christmas, or to be persuaded into driving his fair friends, by moonlight, to supper at the 'Star and Garter,' the other enabled him to take very good care of himself while he was in such dangerous situations. In consequence he had attained the advanced age of twenty-eight when this story opens, a bachelor, and with every prospect of remaining so. But the Blind Bow-Boy, as every one knows, discharges his bolts from the most unexpected quarters; and perhaps you may find yourself mortally wounded in the very place, of all others, where you have hitherto deemed yourself most invulnerable.

It was the end of the second week in August; parliament was up; and Browne's steam-yacht, the *Lotus Blossom*, twelve hundred tons, lay in the harbour of Merok, on the Gieranger Fjord, perhaps the most beautiful of all others on the Norwegian coast. The guests on board had been admirably chosen, an art which in most instances is not cultivated as carefully as it might be. An ill-assorted house-party is bad enough; to bring the wrong men together on the moors is sufficient to spoil an otherwise enjoyable holiday; but to ask Jones (who doesn't smoke, who is wrapped up in politics, reads his leader in the *Standard* every morning, and who has played whist with the same three men at his club for the last ten years every afternoon) and De Vere Robinson (who never reads anything save the *Referee* and the *Sportsman*, who

detests whist, and who smokes the strongest Trichinopolis by day and night) to spend three weeks cooped up on a yacht together would be like putting a kitten and a cat-killing fox-terrier into a corn-bin and expecting them both to have a happy time of it.

Browne, however, knew his business, and his party, in this particular instance, consisted of the Duchess of Matlock, wife of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and her two pretty daughters, the Ladies Iseult and Imogen Lismaine; Miss Verney, the acknowledged beauty of the season; the Honourable Silas Dobson, the American Ambassador; his wife and daughter; George Barrington-Marsh, of the 1st Life Guards; and little Jimmy Foote, a man of no permanent address, but of considerable shrewdness, who managed to make a good income out of his friends by the exercise of that peculiar talent for pleasing which rendered him indispensable whenever and wherever his fellow-creatures were gathered together. In addition to those I have mentioned there was a man whose interest in this story is so great that it is necessary he should be described at somewhat greater length.

Should you deem it worth your while to inquire at any of the Chancelleries whether they happen to be acquainted with a certain Monsieur Felix Maas, you would probably be surprised to learn that he is as well known to them as—well—shall we say the Sultan of Turkey himself? though it would be difficult to mention in what capacity. One thing is quite certain; it would be no easy task to find a man possessed of such peculiar characteristics as this retiring individual. At first glance his name would appear to settle his nationality once and for all. He would tell you, however, that he has no right to be considered a Dutchman. At the same time he would omit to tell you to which kingdom or empire he ascribes the honour of his birth. His friends would inform you that he speaks the language of every country west of the Ural Mountains with equal fluency; and though he would appear to be the possessor of considerable wealth, he never makes the least parade of it. In fact, his one and only idea in life would seem to be always irreproachably dressed and groomed, never to speak unless spoken to, and at all times to act as if he took no sort of interest whatever in any person or thing save that upon which he happens to be engaged at the moment. When necessity demands it he can be exceedingly amusing; he never allows himself to be seen with a man or woman who would be likely to cause him the least loss of prestige; he gives charming little dinners *à la fourchette* to a few intimates at his rooms in town twice or three times during the season, and is rumoured to be the author, under a *nom de plume*, of one of the best works on Continental politics that has seen the light since Talleyrand's day. So much for Felix Maas.

At one time or another there have been a number of exquisite yachts built to satisfy the

extravagance of millionaires, but never one so perfect in every detail and so replete with every luxury as Browne's *Lotus Blossom*. The state-rooms were large and airy; beds occupied the places of the usual uncomfortable bunks; the dining-saloon was situated amidships, where the vibration of the screw was least felt; the drawing-room was arranged aft; and a dainty boudoir for the ladies extended across the whole width of the counter. The smoking-room was in a convenient position under the bridge, and the bathrooms, four in number, were luxury and completeness itself. Add to the other advantages the presence of Felicien, that prince of *chefs*, and little Georges, once so intimately connected with the English Embassy in Paris, and no more need be said.

Browne himself made an excellent host; and by the time the Norwegian coast had been sighted the party had settled down comfortably on board. They visited Christiania, the Bukn, Hardanger, and Sogne, and eventually found themselves at anchor in the harbour of Merok, on the Gieranger Fjord. It is in this lovely bay, overshadowed by its precipitous mountains, that my story may be properly said to commence.

It is sometimes asserted by a class of people who talk of the Eiffel Tower as if it were a bit of natural scenery, and of the Matterhorn as though it were placed where it is simply for the entertainment of Cook's tourists, that when you have seen one Norwegian fjord you have seen them all. But this statement is, as are the majority of such assertions, open to contradiction. The Ryfylke bears no sort of resemblance, save that they are both incomparably grand, to the Hardanger, or the Fjaerlands to the Gieranger. There is, of course, the same solemnity and the same overwhelming sense of man's insignificance about them all. But in every other essential they differ as completely as Windermere does from the Bitter Lakes of Suez—shall we say?—or the Marble Arch from the Bridge of Sighs.

'Knowing what we know, and seeing what we see,' Maas remarked confidentially to the Duchess of Matlock as they sat in their chairs on deck, gazing up at the snow-capped mountains at the head of the fjord, 'one is tempted to believe that Providence, in designing Europe, laid it out with the express intention of pleasing the British tourist.'

'I detest tourists,' replied her Grace as she disentangled the straps of her field-glasses. 'They are terrible people, who cheapen everything, and who think nothing of discussing their private affairs in the Temple of the Sphinx, or of comparing and grumbling at their *dhobie's* accounts under the façade of the Taj Mahal.'

'The inevitable result of a hothouse education, my dear Duchess,' said Jimmy Foote, who was leaning against the bulwarks. 'Believe a poor man who knows, it is just those three annas overcharge in a *dhobie's* bill that spoil a holiday excursion; as far as I am personally concerned, such an imposition would spoil even the Moti Masjid itself.'

'People who quarrel over a few annas have no right to travel,' remarked Mrs Dobson, with the authority of a woman who rejoices in the possession of a larger income.

'In that case, one trembles to think what would become of the greater portion of mankind,' continued Miss Verney, who was drawing on her gloves preparatory to going ashore.

'If that were the law I am afraid I should never get beyond the white walls of Old England,' said Jimmy Foote, shaking his head; 'it is only by keeping a sharp eye on the three annas of which we have been speaking that I manage to exist at all. If I might make a suggestion to the powers that be, it would be to the effect that a university should be founded in some convenient centre—Vienna, for instance. It would be properly endowed, and students might be sent to it from all parts of the world. It should possess competent professors, who would teach the pupils how to comport themselves in railway trains and on board steamboats; who would tell them how to dress themselves to suit different countries, in order that they might not spoil choice bits of scenery by inartistic colouring. Above all, I would have them instructed in the proper manner of placing their boots outside their bedroom doors when they retire to rest in foreign hotels. I remember a ruffian in Paris some years ago (truth compels me to put it on record that he was a countryman of yours, Mr Dobson) who for three weeks used to disturb my beauty-sleep by throwing his boots outside his door in the fashion to which I am alluding. It's my belief he used to stand in the centre of his room and pitch them into the corridor outside, taking particular care that they should land exactly above my head.'

'It occurs to me I have met that man,' observed Maas quietly, lighting another cigarette as he spoke. 'He travels a great deal.'

'Surely it could not be the same man?' remarked Mrs Dobson, with an incredulous air. 'The coincidence would really be too extraordinary.' A smile went round the group; humour was not the lady's strong point.

'To continue my proposal,' said Foote, with quiet enjoyment. 'In addition to imparting instruction on the subjects I have mentioned, I would have my pupils thoroughly grounded in the languages of the various countries they intended visiting, so that they should not inquire the French for eau de Cologne, or ask the meaning of *pâté de foie gras* when they encountered it upon their menus. A proper appreciation of the beautiful in art might follow, in order to permit of their distinguishing between a Sandro Botticelli—shall we say?—and a "Seaport at Sunrise" by Claude Lorraine.'

'A professor who could give instruction upon the intricacies of a Continental wine list might be added with advantage to the world in general; put in Barrington-Marsh.

'And the inevitable result,' said Browne, who had joined the party while Marsh was speaking, 'would be that you might as well not travel at all. Build an enormous restaurant in London, and devote a portion of it to every country into which modern man travels. Hang the walls with tricky, theatrical canvases after the fashion of a cyclorama; engage waiters in appropriate costumes, let them speak the language of the country in which you are supposed to be dining, let the tables be placed in the centre of the hall, have a band to discourse national airs, and you would be able to bore yourself to death in comfort, for the simple reason that every one would talk, eat, drink, and behave just as respectably as his neighbour. Half the fun of moving about the world, as I understand it, lies in the studies of character one has presented by one's fellow-creatures. But, see, the boat is alongside; let us make our way ashore while it is fine.'

Beautiful as Merok undoubtedly is, it must be admitted that its amusements are, to say the least of it, limited. You can lunch at the hotel, explore the curious little octagonal church, and, if you are a walker, climb the road that crosses the mountains to Grotlid. The views are sublime, for the mountains rise on every hand, giving the little bay the appearance of an amphitheatre.

'What is the programme?' inquired Miss Verney, who, as was known to her companions, preferred an easy-chair and a flirtation on the deck of the yacht to any sort of athletic exercise ashore.

Browne thereupon explained that the Duchess, who was dressed in appropriate walking costume, had made out an itinerary. They were to visit the church, do the regulation sights, and, finally, make their way up the hillside to the Storfos Waterfall, which is the principal, and almost the only, attraction the village has to offer. The usual order of march was observed. The Duchess and the Ambassador, being the seniors of the party, led the way; that lady's two daughters, escorted by Barrington-Marsh and Jimmy Foote—who was too obvious a detrimental to be worth guarding against—came next; Maas, Mrs and Miss Dobson followed close in their wake; while Miss Verney and Browne brought up the rear.

On this occasion everything went merrily as a marriage-bell. After those who had brought their cameras had snap-shotted the church, and made the usual mistake with regard to the angles, the party climbed the hill in the direction of the waterfall. It was only when they reached it that those in front noticed that Miss Verney had joined the trio next before her, and that Browne had disappeared. He had gone back to the boat, the lady explained, in order to give some instructions that had been forgotten. From her silence, however, and from the expression of annoyance upon her beautiful face, the others immediately jumped to the conclusion that something more serious must have happened than her words

would seem to imply. In this case, however, popular opinion was altogether at fault. As a matter of fact, Browne's reason for leaving his guests to pursue their walk alone was an eminently simple one. He strolled down to the boat which had brought them ashore, and, having despatched it with a message to the yacht, resumed his walk, hoping to catch his party up before they reached the waterfall. A thick mist meanwhile was descending upon the mountain, shutting out the landscape as completely as if a curtain had been drawn before it. At first he was inclined to treat the matter as of small moment; and, leaving the road, he continued his walk in the belief that it would soon pass off. Stepping warily—for mountain paths in Norway are not to be treated with disrespect—he pushed on for upwards of a quarter of an hour, feeling sure he must be near his destination, and wondering why he did not hear the voices of his friends or the thunder of the fall. At last he stopped. The fog was thicker than ever, and a fine but penetrating rain was falling. Browne was still wondering what Miss Verney's feelings would be, supposing she were condemned to pass the night on the hillside, when he heard a little cry proceed out, as he supposed, of the fog ahead of him. The voice was a woman's, and the ejaculation was one of pain. Hearing it, Browne moved forward again in the hope of discovering whence it proceeded and what had occasioned it. Search how he would, however, he could see nothing of the person who had given utterance to it. At last, in despair, he stood still and called, and in reply a voice said in English, 'Help me; help me, please.'

'Where are you?' Browne inquired in the same language; 'and what is the matter?'

'I am down here,' the voice replied; 'and I am afraid I have sprained my ankle. I have fallen and cannot get up.'

Browne has since confessed it was the voice that did it. Though no fault could be found with what was said, the accent was scarcely that of an Englishwoman.

'Are you on a path or on the hillside?' he inquired, after he had vainly endeavoured to locate her.

'I am on the hillside,' she replied. 'The fog was so thick that I could not see my way, and I slipped on the bank and rolled down, twisting my foot under me.'

'Well, if you will try and guide me, I will do all in my power to help you,' said Browne; and as he said it he moved carefully towards the spot whence he imagined the voice proceeded. From the feel of the ground under his feet he could tell that he had left the path and was descending the slope.

'Am I near you now?' he asked.

'I think you must be,' was the reply. And then the voice added, with a little laugh, 'How ridiculous it all is, and how sorry I am for troubling you!'

Had she known to what this extraordinary introduction was destined to lead it is very doubtful



whether she would have considered it so full either of humour or regret as her words seemed to imply.

Inch by inch Browne continued to advance, until he could just distinguish, seated on the ground below him, and clinging with both her arms to a stunted birch-tree, the figure of the girl for whom he was searching. At most she was not more than five feet from him. Then, with that suddenness which appears to be the peculiar property of Norwegian mists, the vapour which had up to that moment so thickly enveloped them rolled away, and the whole landscape was revealed to their gaze. As he took in the position Browne uttered a cry of horror. The girl had wandered off the path, slipped down the bank, and was now holding on to a tree only a foot or two removed from the brink of one of the most stupendous precipices along the Norwegian coast.

So overwhelmed was he with horror that for a moment Browne found himself quite unable to say or do anything. Then, summoning to his assistance all the presence of mind of which he was master, he addressed the girl, who, seeing the danger to which she was exposed, was clinging tighter than ever to the tree, her face as white as the paper upon which I am now writing. For a moment the young man scarcely knew how to act for the best. To leave her while he went for assistance was out of the question; while it was very doubtful, active as he was, whether he would be able unaided to get her up in her injured condition to the path above. Ridiculous as the situation may have appeared in the fog, it had resolved itself into one of absolute danger, and Browne felt the perspiration start out upon his forehead as he thought of what would have happened had she missed the tree and rolled a few feet farther. One thing was quite certain—something must be done; so, taking off his coat, he lowered it by the sleeve to her, inquiring at the same time whether she thought she could hold on to it sufficiently tight for him to pull her up to the path above. She replied that she would endeavour to do so, and thereupon the struggle commenced. A struggle it certainly was, and an extremely painful one, for the girl was handicapped by her injured foot. Browne from his boyhood, however, had been noted for his strength, but never before had it been exerted in such a way. What if the girl's nerve should desert her and she should let go, or the sleeve of the coat part company with the body? In either case there could be but one result—an instant and terrible death for her.

Taken altogether, it was an experience neither of them would ever be likely to forget. At last, inch by inch, foot by foot, he drew her up; and with every advance she made, the stones she dislodged went tinkling down the bank and, rolling over the edge, disappeared into the abyss below. When at last she was sufficiently close for him to place his arm round her and to lift her into

safety beside him the reaction was almost more than either of them could bear. For some minutes the girl sat with her face buried in her hands, too much overcome with horror at the narrowness of her escape even to thank her preserver. When she *did* lift her face to him, Browne became aware for the first time how attractive she was. Beautiful as Miss Verney was beautiful she certainly could not claim to be; there was, however, something about her face that was more pleasing than mere personal loveliness could possibly have been.

'How did you come to be up here alone?' he inquired, after she had tried to express her gratitude to him for the service he had rendered her.

'It was foolish of me, I admit,' she answered. 'I had been painting on the mountain, and was making my way back to the hotel when the fog caught me. Suddenly I felt myself falling. To save myself I clutched at that tree, and was still clinging to it when you called to me. Oh! how can I thank you? But for you I might now be'—

She paused, and Browne, to fill in the somewhat painful gap, immediately stated that he had no desire to be thanked at all. He insisted that he had only done what was fit and proper. It was plain, however, from the look of admiration he cast upon her, that he was very well satisfied with the part he had been permitted to play in the affair.

While, however, they were progressing thus favourably in one direction, it was evident that they were not yet at an end of their difficulties in another, for the young lady, pretend as she might to ignore the fact, was undoubtedly lame; under the circumstances for her to walk was out of the question, and Merok was distant fully a mile, and a very steep mile, from where they were now seated.

'How shall I get home?' the girl inquired. 'I am afraid it will be impossible for me to walk so far, and no pony could come along this narrow path to fetch me.'

Browne puckered his forehead with thought. A millionaire is apt to imagine that nothing in this world is impossible, provided he has his cheque-book in his pocket and a stylographic pen wherewith to write an order on his banker. In this case, however, he was compelled to confess himself beaten. There was one way out of it, of course, and both knew it. But the young man felt his face grow hot at the very thought of it.

'If you would only let me carry you as far as the main road, I could easily find a conveyance to take you the rest of the distance,' he faltered.

'Do you think you *could* carry me?' she answered, with a seriousness that was more than half-assumed to cover her confusion. 'I am very heavy.'

It might be mentioned here, and with advantage to the story I have to tell, that in his unregenerate days Browne had won many weight-lifting competitions; his modesty, however, prevented his mentioning this fact to her.

'If you will trust me I think I can manage,' he said; and then, without waiting for her to

protest, he picked the girl up, and, holding her carefully in his arms, carried her along the path in the direction of the village. It was scarcely a time for conversation, so that the greater part of the journey was conducted in silence. When at last they reached the mountain road—that wonderful road which is one of the glories of Merok—Browne placed the girl upon the bank, and, calling a boy whom he could see in the distance, despatched him to the hotel for assistance. The youth having disappeared, Browne turned to the girl again. The pain she had suffered during that short journey had made her face very white, but she did her best to make light of it.

'I cannot thank you enough for all you have done for me,' she said, and a little shudder swept over her as the remembrance of how near she had been to death returned to her.

'I am very thankful I happened to be there at the time,' the other replied, with corresponding seriousness. 'If you will be warned by me, you will be careful for the future how you venture on the mountains without a guide at this time of year. Fogs, such as we have had to-day, descend so quickly, and the paths are dangerous at the best of times.'

'You may be sure I will be more careful,' she replied humbly. 'But do not let me keep you now; I have detained you too long already. I shall be quite safe here.'

'You are not detaining me at all,' he answered. 'I have nothing to do. Besides, I could not think of leaving you until I have seen you safely on your way back to your hotel. Have you been in Merok very long?'

'Scarcely a week,' the girl replied. 'We came from Hellesylt.'

Browne wondered of whom the *we* might consist. Was the girl married? He tried to discover whether or not she wore a wedding-ring, but her hand was hidden in the folds of her dress.

Five minutes later a cabriole made its appearance, drawn by a shaggy pony and led by a villager. Behind it, and considerably out of breath, toiled a stout and elderly lady, who, as soon as she saw the girl seated on the bank by the roadside, burst into a torrent of speech.

'Russian,' said Browne to himself; 'her accent puzzled me, but that accounts for it.'

Then turning to the young man, who was experiencing some slight embarrassment at being present at what his instinct told him was a wiggling, administered by a lady who knew very well how to do it scientifically, the girl said in English:

'Permit me to introduce you to my guardian, Madame Bernstein.'

The couple bowed ceremoniously to each other, and then Browne and the villager between them lifted the girl into the vehicle, the man took his place at the pony's head, and the strange cortège proceeded on its way down the hill towards the hotel. Once there, Browne prepared to take leave of them. He held out his hand to the girl, who took it.

'Good-bye,' he said. 'I hope it will not be long before you are able to get about again.'

'Good-bye,' she answered; and then, with great seriousness, 'I hope you will believe that I shall always be grateful to you for the service you have rendered me this afternoon.'

There was a little pause. Then, with a nervousness that was by no means usual to him, he added:

'I hope you will not think me rude, but perhaps you would not mind telling me whom I have had the pleasure of helping?'

'My name is Katherine Petrovitch,' she answered, with a smile, and then as frankly returned his question. 'And yours?'

'My name is Browne,' he replied; and also smiling as he said it, he added: 'I am Browne's Mimosa Soap, Fragrant and Antiseptic.'

## CIVIL SERVICE SHOPKEEPING.

By R. W. JOHNSTON.



SOMETHING less than forty years ago a handful of Post Office clerks, of whom the writer was one, clubbed together for a chest of tea, and parcelled it out amongst them.

That simple transaction has grown into a business which last year amounted to nearly one and three-quarter millions sterling! The Post Office clerk of forty years ago was not a very wealthy individual, and he was sadly perplexed at the 'high price of coals.' But coals were dirty, and difficult of distribution, so he turned his attention to tea as the object of his maiden attempts at co-operation. By-and-by two or three chests were bought and distributed, the money being planked down in advance, so as to secure the best terms

from the wholesale dealer. But soon the local grocer found out that his Post Office customers were not buying tea, and refused to supply them with sugar, on which there is little or no profit. Then came the necessity for co-operating in sugar as well as tea, followed up by difficulties of storage; for up to this point the business had been carried on in a large cupboard in one of the departments at St Martin's-le-Grand. By-and-by the 'Post Office Stores' was formed, with one of the officials of the secretary's office as manager, who announced over the entrance to two modest rooms in Bath Street, Newgate Street, that he was 'licensed to sell tea, coffee, tobacco, and snuff.' Modest as were the rooms thus occupied, the fittings were more modest still, consisting of empty egg-boxes, out of

which a counter and shelves were constructed. Nor was the business on a grand scale, certain articles being supplied on certain days of the week only—thus: tea, sugar, and coffee on Mondays; rice, pickles, &c., on Tuesdays; and so on. But even under these restrictions business prospered amazingly, and it soon became necessary to remove to larger premises, which were found in Bridge-water Square, Aldersgate Street. From there a further removal was soon made to Wood Street, and thence to Monkwell Street, where the stores became consolidated in a measure, and where a very considerable business was done. But caution was still the order of the day; and it is related how, on one occasion, the manager was severely taken to task for his extravagance in ordering at one time a whole hundredweight of moist sugar! The secretary came to his rescue with the remark: 'Don't blame the manager, for you will live to see the time when you will have to buy sugar by the ton.' Both men are probably dead now, but what would they have said of the purchases of sugar to-day, which probably amount to hundreds of tons at a time?

Up to this point Civil Service co-operation was wholly confined to Post Office men. But in or about the year 1866 the other branches of the service sought admission to the benefits of the system, and soon the Customs and Inland Revenue were in full membership. The 'Revenue Departments,' as the three great branches of the service are styled, were soon the envy of the 'West End Offices,' whose members would have been slow to start a 'shop' of their own; and by-and-by all departments were admitted, and the 'Post Office Stores' became the 'Civil Service Supply Association,' with a manager at £120 a year, and a capital in £1 shares, of which 10s. was paid up. Business increased apace, and before very long a move was made to the premises in Queen Victoria Street, which, after repeated extensions, have assumed the proportions of an immense emporium. As a natural corollary of the admission of the West End departments, there was soon a demand for West End accommodation, and before long the Bedford Street Stores were established, which have since overflowed into Chandos Street and Agar Street. Including furniture and fixtures, the premises owned and occupied by the association are valued at close upon *two hundred thousand pounds*, in addition to which a sum not far short of ten thousand a year is paid for 'rent and taxes.' This is an enormous stride from the Bath Street days, when it is improbable that more than £20 or £30 a year was paid for the premises of the original 'Post Office Stores.'

The customers of the association are numbered by tens of thousands, exceeding, as they do, a total of 44,000, of whom 15,000 odd are members of the Civil Service, and 28,000 odd are 'friends of shareholders.' The shareholders number 5286, and the number of shares on the register is 354,480, which, being translated into pounds sterling, represents the capital of the association. Origin-

ally the association was strictly confined to members of the Civil Service, and its co-operative character was then beyond question. But for many years it has admitted the outside public, and has become practically a trading concern, where profits are divided amongst a comparatively small number of its members. There is this to be said, however, that the original founders of the association waited for many years before they received any return, and that, in fact, they built up the business by their energy and enterprise in many directions. The wisdom of admitting the outside public was doubted at the time by many members of the association, and its evil results were very soon apparent in the fierce opposition of the shopkeepers of London, who, while admitting the perfect right of civil servants to co-operate amongst themselves, objected strongly to their trading with the general public. Their ire was further excited by the fact that the association did not then pay income-tax, nor even attach receipt-stamps to their bills. The matter was hotly debated in the press and at public meetings, and members of parliament asked questions about it in the House which were not always either easy or pleasant to answer. It could not exactly be said that civil servants had not a perfect right to use their leisure time as they pleased, and yet this precise use of it could not exactly be defended under then existing regulations. At length it was laid down that officials in high positions should not act as managers of the stores, and that the attendance of those who did act should not be after a certain hour in the morning nor before a certain hour in the evening. In other words, and in plain English, it was laid down that the stores were to be given a wide berth during 'official hours.' Income-tax, now amounting to over two thousand a year, began to be paid, and receipt-stamps were brought into use. This either appeased the shopkeepers or convinced them of the uselessness of further opposition; and such of them as did not set to work to reduce their prices commenced to plough with the enemy's heifer, by converting their businesses into 'stores,' and otherwise imitating the methods of their opponents. Prior to this truce the meetings of the association were a trifle lively, not to say uproarious, and shareholders with the gift of oratory were wont to let themselves go on occasion, and to make it hot for the committee, who sat in a row at the head of the table. But the meetings are now as dull as decorous, and the chairman as a rule has a very easy time. For years past the report has opened with a stereotyped paragraph congratulating the members on 'the continued prosperity of the association,' and the chairman's address has been more devoted to pleasantries than to apologies. The association has, in fact, entered upon that phase of its existence when, as in the case of nations, happiness consists in having no history.

A glance at the figures in the trading accounts for the year 1897-98 reveals a set of transactions

of enormous magnitude. Thus, goods were bought to the amount of over £1,400,000, and sold to the amount of nearly £1,700,000. In the latter amount groceries, wines, provisions, and tobacco figure for upwards of £800,000; fancy goods and ironmongery for £420,000 odd; hosiery, furniture, &c. (a strange combination), for nearly £320,000; clothing, boots, &c., for upwards of £107,000; and china and glass for upwards of £33,000. The net profit on these enormous transactions was a trifle under £47,000, an almost infinitesimal amount compared with the grand total of the sales, although enough, probably, for an institution which claims to be still somewhat of a co-operative society, and to supply its customers at the 'lowest possible prices.' Some of the items in the profit and loss account are interesting. Thus, salaries and allowances figure for considerably more than £100,000; paper, string, and straw for over £10,000; postage and receipt stamps for over £4000; stationery and printing for a nearly similar amount; gas and electric light for more than £4600; and miscellaneous trade expenses for about a similar amount. The carriage of goods considerably exceeds £30,000; nor can we wonder at this when it is estimated that more than a million packages are despatched during the year, and that the packing department alone employs more than five hundred hands. One item merits special attention—namely, £7315 for price lists and circulars, including cost of delivery, but less advertisements.

The price list is a huge volume of over twelve hundred closely printed pages, and is a perfect marvel of detail and exhaustiveness. It contains a guide to nearly fifty separate departments, so various as to include art, clothes, drugs, dyeing, fish, funerals, hair-dressing, music, pianos, saddlery, and travel. An index of more than sixty pages contains a list of over eight thousand separate articles dealt in, including such out-of-the-way things as ants' eggs, bayonets, bibs, cat food, chaff, dolls, dustbins, family Bibles, files, fowls, gin, herrings, ice, 'incivility,' loam, manna, nails, oats, peat, petticoats, pigs' feet, prawns, prayer-books, rat-traps, slugs, straw, tape (red!), tares, tow, urns, vices, washing, wash-ups, yacht wine-glasses, yak lace, and zithers. The association has agents abroad, through whom it carries on a large export business. It makes arrangements for laundry-work and window-cleaning; has a tourist, excursion, railway, and steam-packet agency; conducts auction sales, valuations for probate, life insurance, fire, burglary, and accident insurance, and custom-house and shipping business; and arranges for the supply of governesses and teachers at reduced rates. It provides doctors, dentists, and masseurs at reduced fees, and has made arrangements with the St John's Ambulance Association Invalid Transport Corps for the supply of horse ambulance carriages, litters, stretchers, and carrying-chairs, with qualified attendants. In short, it will bring

you into the world, feed and clothe you, see to your health as well as your teeth, carry you about when on pleasure bent or too lame to walk, bury you when dead, and provide for your widow by a handsome life insurance. It does not yet undertake to marry its members, a clergyman being one of the few 'commodities' not dealt in at the stores. But it will supply you with a wedding-breakfast if you are old-fashioned enough to affect that hospitable form of entertainment, and it will provide the carriages to convey you and your guests to and from church, and yourself and wife to the railway station, 'with coachmen in livery if desired.' In short, there is nothing worth buying which the association does not sell, down to a wooden leg or a club-foot, and up to hats, helmets, and other headgear, not even excepting wigs and wide-awakes. But it sells many things which civil servants, happily, do not require to buy, and many more which they cannot afford—diamonds, for instance. But, having admitted the outside public—the rich, the luxurious, the leisurely—to the privilege of trading with it, the association has, perforce, to keep everything, or practically everything, which may be asked for. It is, in fact, a 'Universal Provider,' with the single exception, perhaps, that it does not provide young men as partners at smart dances, although it provides conjurers and other descriptions of entertainers for evening parties, and the like.

'Going to the stores' has become one of the recognised female dissipations of the day, and the crowded state of the refreshment and toilet departments towards one o'clock is not wholly due to the famished young clerks who flock there in their hundreds to snatch a hasty meal, and otherwise refresh themselves 'at the lowest possible price.'

The association is managed by a committee of fifteen, including a chairman, and representing all the branches, or groups of branches, of the Civil Service. Each member of committee receives £200 a year, so that the total cost of management reaches the respectable sum of £3000 a year. The principal officers are the secretary, with £600 a year; the accountant, with £400 a year; the chief cashier, with a similar amount; and the treasurer, with £200 a year, which amount is also paid to each of the two auditors. The total number of employés exceeds fourteen hundred, and is made up of superintendents, clerks, storekeepers, assistant-storekeepers, dispensers, assistants, mechanics, servants, porters, timekeepers, and so forth. One storekeeper receives as much as £420 a year, one clerk as much as £310 a year, and one mechanic as much as £275 a year; while two dispensers share between them the respectable amount of £520 a year. Assistants are paid wages ranging from £4, 10s. to 7s. a week, the graduation being, no doubt, in accordance with age, experience, and length of service. In fact, Civil Service practice is pretty closely adhered to, and a pension fund provides for the



old age of the employ  s, while a provident fund provides for their sickness, death, or other misfortune. To both of these funds the association is a liberal contributor, £2000 a year being usually granted to the pension fund, and £500 a year to the provident. These funds would appear to be in a flourishing condition, the former having as much as £22,800 to its credit, and the latter not far short of £14,000. The association is, in every respect, a model employer, and lends its countenance to various agencies for the benefit of its employ  s, including cricket clubs and other recreative facilities, and the inevitable 'smoking concert.' On the whole, the consideration is well deserved, and the chronic grumbler against incivility has almost ceased from troubling at the half-yearly meetings, just as his colleague in the Petty Bag Office has ceased to complain of the quality of the butter, the bacon, and the 'baccy.'

The association has had several imitators during the past thirty years, but its method of doing business has hardly been bettered, nor its success eclipsed in any way. There was a 'hive-off' comparatively early when the 'New Civil Service Co-operation' set up close by in Queen Victoria Street, and appealed to much the same class of customers. Apparently there was room enough for both; at all events, the Supply Association has not suffered in any way from what is practically a next-door opposition. Later, the 'Civil Service Co-operative Society,' generally known as the 'Haymarket Stores,' was started, and has attained to considerable proportions. But the most formidable competitor of the association is the 'Army and Navy Co-operative Society,' generally known as the 'Army and Navy Stores,' in Victoria Street, Westminster. In this case the business is on a scale approaching, if it does not exceed, that of the Supply Association, and there may be said to be a very active competition between the two. Probably the Army and Navy and Haymarket Stores have the larger number of 'carriage people' amongst their customers, and there is no more familiar sight than the block of vehicles in Victoria Street on fine afternoons. This, indeed, constituted one of the bitterest complaints of the shopkeepers in the early days, it being pointed out that people would take home

brooms and brushes, for which they had paid cash, in their carriages, and ask the small trader to send home trifling articles for which they took long credit. But the liberality of all the stores in the matter of carriage arrangements has changed all this, and very small orders are now delivered free at any address in London and at many addresses in the country. Other Civil Service trading concerns are the Civil Service Musical Instrument Association, the Civil Service Mutual Furnishing Association, the Civil Service Co-operative Coal Company, and the Army and Navy Auxiliary Co-operative Supply. There is even a Civil Service Bank and a Civil Service Cycle Agency, and, in fact, the title has been made so free with in recent years that it has lost a good deal of its charm as well as its potency.

The pioneers of the stores movement undoubtedly performed a great public service, the rapacity of the shopkeepers thirty years ago being almost beyond endurance. Most articles of everyday use were dear beyond all present day conception, and drugs were prohibitively expensive. As for luxuries, they were not to be thought of in middle-class households, and certainly not in the households of civil servants. Unquestionably the standard of comfort in living has been raised by the extension of the co-operative principle, even in the modified form in which it is displayed in these Civil Service societies. But there has been an outcome of the movement which may have far-reaching results, and a stage has been reached when thoughtful men must feel inclined to pause and reflect. 'Industrialism' may be pushed too far, like most other good things in this world; and the present craze for converting private businesses into joint-stock undertakings is a feature of our civilisation which has its evil side. Admitting the gain which has arisen from the establishment of these great emporia, where everything is sold, there is the very distinct loss of personal skill and supervision, and above all of specialisation; and it may be doubted whether connoisseurs—of tea and wine, for instance—do not cling to the old method of doing business. There are a few establishments, which might be named, which have not suffered much from co-operation, so called, nor are likely to suffer.

## FIDDLER TREEN.

By JAMES PATEY.



HE talk was of wrestling, particularly of the prowess of Dan Gerry of Porthillian. The men sat over their cider, in the clear light of the summer evening; and overhead in weather-stained blue and gold swung the sign of 'The Three Pilchards'—the little thatched inn being affectionately known as 'The Dree.'

It was old Roskruge who pronounced the crowning eulogium on Gerry. 'Take 'en altogether, for good Cornish wrastling, for grip an' for trip, there isn't a man in the county that's the equal o' Dan.'

But Hockaday, the farrier, qualified the panegyric. 'Onless 'tis Jan Tregooze; but he's hardly to be reckoned, for his wrastling days be awver. He's a changed sawl now, an' hath j'ined the Partic'lars.'

'For the matter o' that,' answered Roskrugre gravely, 'I don't hold with 'en. 'Tis a good script'ral sort o' sport, for 'tis written that the angel wrestled wi' forefather Jacob; an' if 'tis fitty for an angel o' heaven, 'tis fitty for Jan Tregooze.'

Hockaday differed as he filled his pipe. 'Jan's about right; he says 'tis better to bring a sinner to his knees than to putt 'en on his back.'

Up the street there was a scamper of gathering children, and on the wind came the keen notes of a fiddle.

'I've seed some brave wrastling in my days,' observed Roskrugre, growing reminiscient over his second pint. 'There was Carwidden, that travelled about to fairs, a famous chap, sure 'nough! I've seed 'en take a mazed bullock by the horns an' drive 'en tail fore.'

Hockaday, looking up the street, cried suddenly, 'Bless my sawl! here comes old Fiddler Treen!'

It was a queer figure that came limping towards the little group at the inn—a shrunken old fellow, with a ruddy, puckered face and straggling wisps of white hair. At his back he carried a leathern bag, from which protruded the neck of a fiddle. His loose coat reached his heels, and the original colour of it would have been a matter for antiquarian research. Lifting his battered wide-awake, he saluted the company with a courtesy that was two generations out of date.

'Waarm weather, fiddler,' observed Roskrugre civilly.

'Waarm 'tis,' said the old man, mopping his bald head. 'I sim the miles be getting longer, an' the hills be getting steeper.' Whereupon Hockaday pushed the cider across the table; and when the fiddler's face was buried in the hospitable jug the men glanced at each other, and Roskrugre tapped his forehead significantly.

'Where be bound?' asked Hockaday.

'Porthalla Revel o' Friday,' answered the fiddler. 'But, law! 'tis a revel no more. There's a club-walking now, an' a school trate, an' a *tay*—this last word was spoken with intense scorn; 'tis terrible tame. Bless 'ee! I can mind, backalong, when Porthalla Revel was a sight to behold—caravans, an' booths, an' roundygoes, an' standings by the dizzen, two or dree score couples dancing to wance, iss, an' oceans o' drink, an' a hatful o' money for the fiddler. 'Tis getting a poor sort o' world!'

'Iss, iss, times be altered,' said Roskrugre sympathetically.

'Altered, sure 'nough!' replied the old man. 'The old ways be dying out, an' the old folks, an' the old toons. What be I but a sort o' ancient bygone?'

'When you comed along, fiddler,' said Jordan, one of the younger men, giving a trend to the conversation, 'us was talking 'bout wrastling.'

'An' very purty talk, too,' observed the fiddler. 'Us reckoned that Dan Gerry wid be the champion o' these parts.'

'Iss, iss! he's a spry feller, an' there's strength

in 'en,' replied Fiddler Treen; 'but I've seed a man Bodmin-way that's more to my fancy.'

The men, with sudden interest, leaned forward as Hockaday asked, 'What's the name of 'en?'

'Simon Widgery—he's a thatcher by trade; a spare-built man, wiry, with limbs like iron, an' as supple as a conger. Gerry'd find his mate in that chap, if he didn't find his maister.'

Roskrugre, thumping the table, cried excitedly, 'If us could bring they two together 'twid be a brave match!'

Hockaday, with some emotion, answered 'Twid!'

After the fiddler had rested a bit he resumed his journey, and when he had limped away Roskrugre said sadly, 'Poor old sawl, trapesing about from place to place! 'Tis time he settled down to Christian ways.'

'Iss, a queer old man,' replied Hockaday; 'an' always a bit touched. Us found 'en starving wance on Gerran Moor, an' there was some talk o' putting 'en under restraint for a mazed wanderer; but 'twid be like caging a saybird.'

'I've heard tell,' said Jordan in a low voice, 'that Fiddler Treen hath the power o' evil.'

'Iss, 'tis true,' answered Roskrugre solemnly.

'Do 'ee mind Squire Nick Vivian? He was a wild fellow; an' wance as he was driving home from Porthalla market, mad wi' drink, the fiddler stood in the hedge to let 'en pass, an' he lashed at the old man with his whip, for no mortal raison but out o' pure devilment. 'Twas a nasty cut, an' some of us wid have the fiddler take the law o' the squire, an' us'd pay the charges. But the old fellow wid hear no talk o' law; he wiped the blid from his face, an' he looked deadly patient. Then he took his fiddle, an' he played a little sawft toon. "There, my dears," says he; "that's for Squire Nick's burying." An', sure enough, before the year was out squire was in the churchyard.'

'Tis said, too,' added the dismal Jordan in a mysterious whisper, 'that he knaws the evil toon the nine maidens danced to—the very toon that was played by Old Iniquity hisself.'

'Rubbish!' cried Hockaday, with an impatient laugh. 'I warn't hearken to such fulishness.'

But Roskrugre shook his head in rebuke. 'Tis no fulishness, Joe Hockaday, for there they stand to this day, the nine o' 'em, changed to granite stone for their wickedness.'

In the course of the next few days the rumour inevitably reached Dan Gerry of this Bodmin man who was more than a match for him, and the soul of Gerry burned within him. He loudly proclaimed his willingness to meet the thatcher at any place or time; and the challenge was noised about the country-side. But Bodmin was far, and the whereabouts of Widgery were only vaguely known, so it is probable that the invitation would never have reached him if Roskrugre had not hit upon the expedient of entrusting its delivery to Fiddler Treen.

It was some months later, at a sheep-shearing

at Tregarry, that Treen encountered the thatcher. There was much company at the farm, and the services of the fiddler had been retained for a crown and a night's lodging.

At the great supper Treen found himself seated opposite Widgery, and fulfilled his embassy with considerable tact. Catching the man's eye, he raised his glass in salutation, and said politely, 'Here's joy to 'ee! You'm a brave wrestler, Simon Widgery, an' folks have heard of 'ee beyond the moors. I tell 'ee, thatcher, that the fame of 'ee hath gone forth!'

The thatcher was a good-natured, modest man, and impervious to the old fellow's flattery.

'Did 'ee ivver hear tell o' Dan Gerry o' Porthillian?' asked the fiddler.

'Caan't say I have,' said Widgery.

'He's reckoned the champion wrestler o' Cornwall,' continued the fiddler.

But Widgery went on with his supper unconcernedly.

'He wid dearly like to meet thee in a match,' proceeded the old man; 'and there's some say he'd maister 'ee.'

The thatcher's interest was centred on his plate, and he made no reply.

Then, raising his voice, the fiddler said, with an important air, 'Simon Widgery, 'tis a challenge—take it or I've it. I bring 'ee word from Dan Gerry that he'd be proud to wrestle with 'ee.'

'I bide in my awn parts, an' I mind my awn business,' answered Widgery.

'Then there's wisdom in 'ee,' said Treen significantly, 'for Gerry'd surely maister 'ee. Iss, there's rare wisdom in 'ee.'

The taunt rankled in Widgery. There were many men present, to say nothing of the farm-maidens, and he resented this imputation of sagacity. During the remainder of the meal he plied the fiddler with questions as to the geography of Porthillian, and the means of getting there; and when the huge junket bowl was brought in, crowned with cream and nutmeg, Fiddler Treen cried triumphantly, 'Then 'tis a match!'

Widgery quietly answered, 'Tis.'

One wild night the wagon of the Porthillian carrier made its adventurous way across the moor. There was a gale from the south-west—a Cornish gale, half-wind, half-water. There were brimming pools in the hollows of the tarpaulin, and at every lurch the wagon was fringed with a cataract.

There was a certain hilarity about the driver that was inconsistent with his saturated condition. He whistled occasionally, and wasted gusts of song upon the hurricane; and in lulls of the tempest he would turn and fling jocularities into the recesses of the vehicle, from which came bursts of responsive laughter.

The wagon pulled up at the 'Three Pilchards,' and Tregoweth, the landlord, came eagerly forth with a stable lantern. 'I've brought 'en!' shouted the carrier, shaking himself like a wet dog; and

a tall figure, shrouded in a mackintosh, leapt from the wagon and ran into the lighted inn.

'You'm welcome, Simon Widgery,' cried Tregoweth, bringing the stranger forward to the fire; and Roskruge, Hockaday, and the others, who had been keenly waiting his arrival, rose and greeted the man heartily.

'Here's Dan Gerry!' cried Roskruge as the Porthillian champion came forward; and the rivals shook hands civilly. Widgery was the slighter, and looked almost slim in his long mackintosh.

'Who's to be maister?' asked Hockaday of Peter Roskruge when the Bodmin man was stripped of his waterproof.

The old man looked critically from one to another, and said slowly, 'Iss, that's the question—who's to prevail? They'm a purty pair—'tis betwixt an' between. 'Tis p'raps with wan, an' perryventure with t'other. Wan thing's certain; 'twill be a brave match.'

The contest could not immediately take place, for Gerry had gone a-fishing and been bitten in the hand by a conger. The hurt was trifling, and was fast healing; for in his wisdom he had consulted Bathsheba Munday of Treleven, who had touched the wound and repeated her infallible formula, 'Conger, conger, harm the man no longer.' Opinions differed as to the nature of Mrs Munday's benison; some held that the virtue lay in the words, others in the woman. It is recorded that a St Budoc body had vainly used the words of the charm and the wound had festered.

The week's delay gave the promoters time to complete their arrangements for the matches, for there were to be other contests at the meeting, the Gerry-Widgery match being the crowning event. Money was gathered from all quarters, for the scheme provided a generous prize for the victor and a substantial solace for the vanquished. There was some talk of a tent from Plymouth; but this was abandoned on the score of expense, and they fell back on the old expedient of a 'fuzzy ring'—a rude arena of hurdles and fagots of dried furze piled high enough to intercept the gaze of all outside the enclosure.

The day came, and there was a great gathering. The ring of furze had been pitched in a level upland meadow, wind-swept and open; northward the country rose to the blue moors, and to the south it dipped in undulations to the sea. Hundreds of men paid tribute at the narrow entrance, and crowded into the arena—miners mostly, with a sprinkling of fishermen and mechanics, and here and there a farmer or a veterinary surgeon. It was rumoured that old Parson Edwards would dearly have liked to be present, but decorum forbade; so he aided the fund with a surreptitious guinea.

Roskruge was umpire, and sat solemnly at a table, with the list of competitors before him. Stuck high upon a pole behind him was the champion's trophy, the symbol of supremacy, a

hat rosetted and beribboned—its supplement being seven sovereigns in a leathern purse. On the opposite side of the arena Tregoweth dispensed cakes and drink; and near him, playing interminable jigs and country-dances, was Fiddler Treen, seated regally upon a barrel. It was the best of weather; the sky was blue and cloudless, and gloriously blue was the distant stretch of Cornish sea.

The sports began with their minor interests and humours. Sam Hocken, the butcher, threw his opponents so easily that there was some talk of his challenging the champion after the great match. David Jury and young Pascoe, notoriously rivals in a love-matter, betrayed such animosity in their wrestling that the judicious Roskruge parted them.

A diversion was caused by the sudden entry into the ring of Mrs Polgethy. Scorning the money-taker, she made her way to the centre, wet-aproned and bare-armed, evidently fresh from the wash-tub, and in a shrill, angry voice that verged upon a scream, she cried, 'Where's my man? Where's 'Binadab?'

A big fellow came sheepishly forward from the crowd of men. He was about to wrestle with a gigantic miner; but he quailed before the eye of the little woman. The wrath of Mrs Polgethy found vent in the terrible question, 'Hast thee digged they tetties?'

Alas! the silence of Abinadab too plainly indicated that the potatoes were undug.

'Shame upon 'ee, 'Binadab Polgethy! Here be I working an' slaving from morn till night, while you'm idling like a good-for-nort, making sport for this tribe o' gaping fules!'

And the scorn of Mrs Polgethy, which had been focussed on her spouse, now took a wider range, and she swept the arena with her contemptuous gaze. There was a titter, but no conspicuous sign of resentment, for Mrs Polgethy had a reputation for repartee; she could hit off a man's defect of character or appearance in a facile epigram, and her nicknames stuck like burs. It was not until Abinadab had departed, and the white apron of his wife fluttered behind him through the exit, that the company dared break into their shout of derisive laughter.

Then came the great contest, and a thrill of expectation ran through the crowd when the umpire called the names. Widgery and Gerry entered the ring and formally saluted each other. Roskruge, who had hitherto presided with magisterial calm, could not conceal his eagerness as he gave the signal.

The men instantly closed, and Gerry had the initial advantage of grip—an advantage which he never lost. In a few moments it became evident that Widgery was struggling with a stronger man. Yet he made a wonderful defence, full of surprising recoveries. The dense crowd swayed with excitement as they watched the writhing forms, and a proud shout rose from Porthillan throats when the stranger went under.

But the second bout went otherwise. Widgery played warily; Gerry's points were grapple and sheer strength, and the Bodmin man dodged till he could close with benefit. There was a sinuosity about the fellow that was almost serpentine; his method was dexterous, but, devoid of attack, it seemed mere defensive wriggling. Suddenly, however, there was a stiffening of the elusive limbs, a heaving of the crouching back, and Gerry was flung off and fell with a thud. It was an astonishing throw; it evoked an enthusiasm that overwhelmed all local jealousy, and a loud cheer went up from the ranks of Tuscany.

Conjecture was keen as to the ultimate victor, and to conjecture he must be left; for, while the men rested, Hockaday rekindled his pipe, that had gone out in the breathless interest of the contest, and carelessly flung the match into the furze. There was instantly a blaze, and in a few seconds the fagots were alight. An attempt was made to beat out the flames, but the wind blew the fire along the screen of furze, and the dry fuel caught with amazing speed. There was a general rush for the narrow outlet; shouting, laughing, coughing, the crowd of men surged out into the open meadow.

'Bless my sawl an' body!' cried Roskruge, looking ruefully at the fire. Half the arena was now ablaze; myriads of sparks flew up in the sunshine from the semicircle of flame, and a widening cloud of gray smoke overspread the landscape.

The men for the most part took a humorous view of the conflagration, and watched it with something akin to amusement; when suddenly, above the roar of the fire and the multitudinous crackling, there rose the piercing music of a fiddle!

'Where's the fiddler? Where's Fiddler Treen?' cried a dozen voices. Then, with a gasp of horror, the men realised that the old fellow was inside the blazing ring.

'Treen! Fiddler Treen! come forth!' they shouted. But the music continued. The tune was 'Judy Jinks,' and the rollicking ditty sounded horribly grotesque in the circumstances.

'The fiddler's mazed!' cried Hockaday; and Dan Gerry said, 'Iss, us must stop that toon!' and, running towards the entrance to the arena, he disappeared in the smoke.

There was an agony of waiting, but Gerry did not return; and the fiddling continued, with a wild quickening of the time. Several men attempted to tear a gap where the fagots had not yet caught, but they were driven back, half-suffocated.

There were frantic cries of 'Gerry! Gerry!' and by this time many women, attracted by the fire, had come upon the scene. A girl with wild eyes and a piteous face clutched Widgery by the arm, and asked, 'Where's my Dan?' and the Bodmin man, without a word, plunged blindly to the rescue, and was lost in the dense gray cloud.



But neither Gerry nor Widgery came back, and the dreadful fiddling was fast and furious—'Judy Jinks' had reached delirium.

Hockaday would have followed, but the men held him back. The frenzied music became incoherent, and ominously ceased; and nothing was heard but the roar and crackle of the fire.

Then God, in His pity, changed the wind; the tongues of flame veered, and there was a sudden clearing in the smoke. The scene was laid bare, with its charred hurdles and heaps of smoking ashes, and the farther hedge of fagots still ablaze.

With a cry the men rushed forward. They found Widgery lying face downward, unconscious, but alive; and Gerry near him, far gone in suffocation. Both men were badly burned, but happily not beyond the doctor's skill. After weeks of tender nursing Widgery returned to his native Bodmin with a new skin, but minus his eyebrows; and the face of Gerry was indelibly seared.

As for Fiddler Treen, they led him forth elated and unscathed, with the smell of the burning upon him and a touch of the fire in his singed white hair. His face was grotesquely blackened, and there was a strange light in his little beady eyes. One hand clutched his fiddle, the strings

of which had snapped, and he flourished his bow in salutation to the crowd.

'I baint so spry as the rest of 'ee,' cried the old fellow, 'an' my scampering days be awver. When the lot of 'ee cleared out, 'twas a poor job for the fiddler. 'Twas flame an' smoke everywhere. I rinned here, an' I rinned there, but there was no way out. 'Twas fire an' blazes round about, an' the old fiddler in the middle of it. I said to meself, "Fiddler, 'tis surely the end of 'ee, for the chariot's come." Then I drew the bow across my fiddle for the last time, for the sake o' bygoness; an' when I heard the voice of 'en I said, "If 'tis to be, please th' Ordainer, I'll go home fiddling!" An' I tell 'ee, they danced to the toon, the flames o' fire danced fitty to the toon, an' thousands o' sparks! But 'twas cruel hot, too hot for mortal catgut, an' wan by wan the strings went—all but the G; he's all right—he plucked the metal string affectionately. 'Iss, I reckon the G's like his maister—there's a few toons left in 'en yet.'

Thus ended untimely the great match between Widgery of Bodmin and Dan Gerry of Porthillian. The prize-money was equally divided between the two men. As for that coveted trophy of championship, the bedizened hat, its finery of ribbons was consumed in the fire, and the charred ruin was an object for no man's aspiration.

## THE OFFICERS' MESS.

**S**URELY it is high time,' writes a brilliant young staff-officer, 'that a prophet should arise and dispel the old time-honoured tradition that officers of Her Majesty's regular army habitually drink more than is good for them, play for more than they can afford to lose, and nightly turn their mess-rooms into bear-gardens.' And who is responsible for this widely prevalent belief as far as the ordinary middle-class civilian is concerned? The novelist, we fear; and not only the lady novelist of the present day, but those popular masters of a generation or more back—Lever and Whyte-Melville, for instance, who painted things as they then found them, and whose works are still regarded by many as standard authorities on the social side of the military career. However, the mess-dinner, usually selected as the background for a scene of general 'bedevilment,' has long since ceased to be a gorge accompanied with intemperance. It has been curtailed into a gentlemen's dinner-party, at the conclusion of which the wine is passed round once or twice, and then five out of six of the diners betake themselves to smoking. Neither is the evening capped with the rowdiness of practical joking; in short, 11.30

P.M. will on most nights see the anteroom empty and most people in bed. An excellent story is told by an American humorist of his disillusionment in this respect. The writer first acknowledges to having been so fascinated by the tales of 'glorious disorder' contained in novels dealing with military life that he pays a visit to a friend in Canada for the express purpose of obtaining an invitation to dine at the mess of some British regiment. The eventful night arrives, and the American guest describes how he at once recognises the different characters seated at the table. There is the loud-voiced major with a digestion ruined by long sojourn in Eastern climes; that pale-faced, dark-haired captain must be the villain of the piece, the seducer of young subalterns from the paths of temperance and honour, who will wind up with a disreputable crash and disappearance from the army list. Surely that fat, light-haired subaltern can be none other than the good-humoured butt of the regiment; close to him is sitting the rollicking Irish doctor, whose wonderful stories will soon convulse all with laughter. As the evening wears on, however, our friend discovers no signs of reckless joviality. The dark-haired captain does not utter a word on the subject of cards or horses; the Irish doctor is mildly

amusing, but nothing more; while the adjutant evinces no disposition to bring in his charger to jump the mess-table for a wager. By the time the coffee-stage is reached the American has to own himself 'done brown;' he is merely dining with a company of quiet, well-bred gentlemen such as he might meet at his own club; accordingly he returns home to burn his novels.

The foregoing, of course, is nothing more than a fancy sketch; but we should be afraid to say how many persons there still are, some of them with sons in the service even, who at heart believe that the young bloods at least think it due to their cloth to live up to the shockingly fast and extravagant mess-life depicted by the most approved military novelists. A glance at the 'Queen's Regulations and Orders for the Army,' however, will show how paternal the authorities have grown in their determination to check any recrudescence of the old-time abuses. The commanding officer is now held severely responsible that the officers' mess is conducted without unnecessary expense or extravagance, and by his own frequent presence at the mess-table, his personal example, and every other means in his power, he is expected to encourage economical habits and careful management of all details.

Let us now explain briefly the constitution of the ordinary regimental mess. They are divided, like clubs, into two classes—namely, those in which the members contract with a caterer or mess-man to supply articles, to cook for and generally run the mess; and those in which the officers do their own catering by the employment of non-commissioned officers as caterers, when, of course, all pecuniary transactions with tradesmen are under the immediate supervision of the mess-committee, acting on behalf of the officers. In the latter case a sergeant is allowed to act as the officers' mess-man or superintendent of the mess-establishment; but no non-commissioned officer may be employed in any menial capacity about the mess.

Let us now take the case of some young officer joining his regiment for the first time. On his arrival he will find a card awaiting him from the mess-president, on which Colonel Blank and his brother-officers present him with their compliments, and request the pleasure of his company at dinner on this his first night of a new life. This invitation he must be careful to answer. He will be welcomed with comrade-like friendliness; but there will be no approach to an orgy, as in the old days when the bewildered lad 'might reckon on having made a favourable impression if he then proved his ability to swallow an immoderate amount of liquor without becoming more than moderately drunk.' At the present day, on the contrary, his companions will be taking keen stock of their new comrade. If quiet and unassuming, a favourable first impression will have been created; if bumptious, the young officer will soon be snubbed and

wheeled into line, though it is every day becoming less the fashion to attain this end by thrusting his uniform up the chimney, smashing up his furniture, or turning him out on the parade-ground in his pyjamas.

Next let us investigate our young friend's contributions to the Regimental Mess Fund. On first appointment he is required to give thirty days' pay, which, at five shillings and threepence per day, pans out to £7, 17s. 6d. However, this contribution is not required all at once; it is charged in monthly instalments of three days' pay. The ordinary yearly subscription after this is eight days' pay, which is charged in advance in quarterly payments from date of appointment; while he may be further called upon for an extra subscription, covering all incidental mess expenses, not exceeding fifteen shillings a month.

The next question is, What is the average cost of messing per day, or the price of breakfast, lunch, and dinner, without allowance for wine or beer? The average cost in any well-ordered regiment is four shillings a day; it has been known to be done cheaper, and of course in some cavalry regiments and 'crack' corps the amount is considerably higher. However, four shillings a day may be taken as a very fair average, and we cannot say that we think this sum to be at all out of the way. The house-dinner in the cheapest of the recognised London clubs comes to half-a-crown, including table-money; and there are few places, we fancy, where one can get a gracefully served breakfast and luncheon, with no lack of variety, for the combined sum of eighteenpence. In fact, it is only fair to state that the ordinary charges for daily messing have been brought within such limits that those officers who may not have much private means may be enabled to live in a comfortable and suitable manner.

Of course, an officer's wine-bill is what he chooses to make it. The old practice of 'pooling' the expense of all the wine drunk at dinner has been discontinued. In fact, very little wine is now drunk before dessert. Enter the mess-rooms of what are popularly considered the most expensive regiments, and ten to one that you will find the majority of diners drinking beer or whisky and soda. Whatever is drunk, though, must be properly decanted, for it is a *sine quâ non* that no bottles may appear on a mess-table. The trial of the famous Lord Cardigan for shooting a Captain Tuckett in a duel arose originally from what was known as the 'Black Bottle Riot,' which was a dispute over this point of mess-table etiquette. When stationed at Canterbury, Cardigan ordered a certain Captain Reynolds under arrest for refusing to remove a bottle of Madeira placed before him; hence a feud arose, which culminated in a duel with one of Reynolds's brother-officers, and Cardigan's subsequent trial by his peers.

While on this subject reference must be made

to the Regent's Allowance. This is, strictly speaking, an allowance of after-dinner wine, or rather the money to buy it, whereby those officers who cannot otherwise afford it may be enabled to drink the Queen's health. It appears that the 'First Gentleman in Europe' was dining one evening with some regiment, and after dinner noticed that some of the officers did not drink the King's health. In reply to his inquiry, he was informed that no disloyalty was meant thereby, but that these officers could not afford to drink wine every night. The Regent thereupon instituted the wine-allowance which bears his name to this day. In most regiments the sum thus received is paid into the general mess-fund. In the marines, however, each dining member can either drink one glass of wine every night, or else can be credited thereof in his mess-bill. A curious anachronism arose during the Crimean war in connection with this custom. In those days the allowance, however much it might be, was divided among the dining members at the mess; and, owing to the absence on active service of the large majority of officers, of the few that remained behind each received such a large share of the allowance in cash that they were virtually being paid a fixed sum per night to dine at mess. At the headquarters of the marines, both artillery and light infantry, the officers' messes are renowned for their excellence and cheapness. This is partly owing to their stationary character, and partly to the very large number of dining members usually present.

As we have already pointed out, every officers' mess possesses a board of control in the shape of a mess-committee, with a mess-president at its head. The latter's term of office usually lasts a year; and it is no exaggeration to state that it is a most thankless undertaking. For twelve weary months this unfortunate officer is not only burdened with the casting up of accounts, but has to bear the brunt of all the complaints that even in the best-managed messes are always forthcoming. Major A. strongly disapproves of the new brand of port; Major B. declares it is the only stuff worth drinking. Captain C. complains that the mess-sergeant, a post corresponding to that of butler, has a private spite against his servant, whom he details unfairly for waiting at table. Captain D. bursts with indignation because the dinner was not quite up to the mark—at least so he says—the night a wealthy relative was his guest. Jones complains that the mess-stationery is cheap and nasty, Brown has a fault to find with the carpet, while Robinson declares that he is being charged for purely fictitious breakages. All of these complaints, and hundreds like them, have to be inquired into and answered; and to those natures which are apt to take such fault-finding in a rather personal spirit, life, for the time being, will appear to be hardly worth living. But the last straw is reached when some young subaltern, who in his parents' country rectory or quiet suburban villa

has been accustomed to make a simple dinner off the family joint, enters a long complaint about the quality of his regimental six-course meal, and suggests the introduction of an extra *entrée*. One sarcastic mess-president has a never-failing rejoinder for such as these: 'If you say any more, we shall have to send you home to rough it for a bit.'

The interior economy of an officers' mess is governed by the mess-meetings which are held once every three months, for the purpose of publicly auditing the accounts, and for discussing any propositions that may be brought forward. On these occasions the commanding officer is in the chair, the meeting is regarded in the light of a parade, and all officers have to be present in uniform. The votes of the latter are taken upon any proposition on which a difference of opinion is found to exist, provided, of course, that the 'C. O.' concurs. As is only right and proper, the regulations governing the payment of mess and wine bills are most rigidly adhered to. By the second of the month the accounts are presented to each member of the mess, and they must be paid on or before the seventh. Any officer neglecting to comply with this rule is called upon by his commanding officer for an explanation; and if the result be unsatisfactory, and the account be not settled by the fourteenth of the same month, the officer is liable to be suspended as a member of the mess, and the circumstances reported to the general officer commanding. Again, before any officer proceeds on leave for a period longer than seven days he has to certify that he has paid his mess-bill up to date.

To turn to the subject of regimental entertaining, concerning which considerable misconception appears to exist. As a matter of fact only one entertainment is recognised by the authorities, and that the lunch or dinner given to the inspecting general officer on the date of his annual inspection. Towards this all officers must subscribe, but in distributing the cost the charges are apportioned in shares of so many days' pay to each individual officer; hence the expense very properly falls more lightly upon the junior than upon the senior ranks. Balls and all other expensive regimental entertainments can only be given on the responsibility of officers commanding units, who must in every case obtain the sanction of the general officer commanding the district. Before granting such permission, however, the latter must first satisfy himself as to the wishes of the officers concerned, and take care that no undue extravagance is indulged in. Whenever it is proposed to give an entertainment of any kind, from a ball to a garden-party, the mess-president, acting for the colonel, has to circulate a paper among the officers notifying the proposal. Only those officers who sign the paper, thereby signifying their concurrence, can be called upon to pay any share of the expense incurred; and in this particular every care is taken to protect the young officer unblest with much

private means from being made the subject of undue pressure. Of course, it is hard to say 'No;' but commanding officers are expected to extend their special countenance and protection to any who, from motives of economy, may decline to share in such festivities. Officers are now absolutely forbidden to combine, whether regimentally or otherwise, for the purpose of giving luncheon parties at race-meetings or entertainments of any similar kind; while the old expensive practice of entertaining units on arrival at or departure from a station is also prohibited. Any hospitality of this kind has to be limited to making their brothers-in-arms honorary members of the mess, which means that the latter pay for what they have in the ordinary way.

On joining, every officer is provided with a soldier-servant, whose wages are fixed at ten shillings a month, and who, as he has to take his turn in waiting at dinner, must be furnished by his master with a suit of the regimental livery. The cost of this is nothing excessive; the liveries are made by the regimental master-tailor; and officers can take over liveries with a change of servants. It will be hardly necessary to point out that the larger a mess is, the more facilities there are for economical management. With this object in view, all officers, except married officers, present at regimental headquarters are obliged to be dining members of the mess; while married officers, when their wives or families are absent, have also to become dining members. Seconded officers, however, are exempt from the payment of subscriptions to their line battalions, and this same rule applies to those studying at the staff college or attending the School of Musketry, who, of course, are then subscribing to the messes at those establishments. In conclusion, the supply of equipment necessary for the proper comfort and maintenance of a mess is regarded as a charge against the reserve mess-fund, and the latter may be only applied to the purchase of articles of ordinary use and to the payment of the premiums by which the whole of the mess property is insured against fire. The whole of the mess allowance granted by the Allowance Regulations, except such reasonable portion as is required to provide hardware and other utensils, is applied to the reduction of the daily expenses of the mess, for the benefit exclusively of the officers who attend it.

The practice which has prevailed in some regiments of presents of plate being made by officers on first appointment, on promotion, or on other occasions, is now supposed to be forbidden. However, the authorities wink at the transgression of this rule in regard to officers retiring from the mess on their marriage, when it is customary for the gallant bridegroom to present the regimental mess with some piece of plate; and again in the case of senior officers, who have, perhaps, spent their life in the regi-

ment, and who are anxious not to say good-bye without leaving behind them some memento of their career in the old corps.

It would be impossible within the limits of this article to deal with the fascinating subject of historical regimental plate. Two examples of an interesting nature may, however, be quoted. Not so long ago the order went forth for a certain famous battery of horse artillery to be converted into a field one. Mournfully and solemnly, accordingly, all the magnificent battery plate was sent to be melted down and remodelled into a huge centre-piece, representing a broken pillar, which now adorns the dinner-table of the transformed unit. The 51st Regiment (Yorkshire Light Infantry) pass round after dinner a beautifully-made model silver gun-carriage on which is a silver coffin containing snuff, or, as it is termed, 'the ashes of the old 51st.' As we all know, the grand mahogany dinner-tables of our grandfathers have disappeared into the limbo of the past; they have likewise practically ceased to exist in regimental mess-rooms. There is, however, a magnificent survival at the headquarters artillery-mess at Woolwich, and a militia regiment, the Monmouthshire Submarine Miners, also possess one. But these tables require the greatest attention; they may only be polished by hand; hence defaulters are told off to subject them to an hour or so of what may be described as massage treatment, which is the proper way of obtaining the necessary shine.

To conclude, we trust that we have shown by the foregoing particulars that the authorities fully recognise that the establishment of a well-conducted, economical regimental mess is an object of the utmost importance, and one which requires the unremitting attention of the commanding officer. And it may be truthfully said that this aim has been attained, and with it the complete disappearance of the old rowdy, toying, extravagant adjuncts, which certainly had considerable foundation on fact in Crimean and Mutiny days.

#### TO THE ROBIN.

SING, Robin, sing; your song is always sweet,  
And sweetest when the year draws near its close.  
Time marches on—and not with lagging feet—  
Alike through summer sun and winter snows;  
But you are no fair-weather friend who goes,  
On eager wing, to brighter lands than these  
Because the honeysuckle and wild-rose  
No longer toss pink petals to the breeze.  
Nay! If for pleasure or for livelihood  
You sometimes wander from the haunts of men  
To visit leafy copse and flowerful wood,  
With autumn's mist you come to us again.  
In scarlet vest, which colours dreary days,  
With loyal heart you come our gloom to cheer—  
Sing, Robin, sing! and from the leafless sprays  
Wish all the world a bright and glad New Year.

E. MATHESON.